



Photography: Jim Newson, images by Art

Going for Gould

According to renowned dressage trainer Dane Rawlins, Andrew Gould is the face of dressage in the future. High praise indeed, but have such accolades gone to Andrew's head? **Kathy Carter** discovers that the answer is to the contrary

Andrew Gould has built a reputation within the dressage industry as a hardworking young rider and family man. Along with wife Polly, he has established a successful training yard and is working his way to the top – he is currently sixth in the British Dressage small tour rankings and is a member of the 2006 World Class Potential Dressage Squad at gold level.

Andrew, 26, runs Priory Dressage in a leafy corner of Surrey, and his high-profile neighbours include Anthea Turner and Russian multimillionaire Boris Berezovsky. However, with a punishing regime of looking after the 23 horses at his yard, there's no time for celebrity hobnobbing at Chris Evans's favourite pub and Andrew's local, the White Horse.

"Running a business like ours is a seven day a week job," Andrew explains. "People perceive dressage to be quite glamorous, but they don't see all the hard work that goes into it. It is a very stressful career and there's little reward at the end, although there is a great feeling of personal accomplishment."

A man with his feet on the ground

This is not to say that Andrew is disillusioned with the sport; rather, that he is extremely grounded and has a practical approach to his chosen career. He understands that reaching the top takes dedication, and it is this pragmatic attitude that has earned him respect from his peers. "Andrew is doing this the hard way, by earning a living," says dressage rider and trainer Dane Rawlins. "He is a great up-and-coming rider, and definitely a name to watch."

Andrew balances international competition with his training responsibilities at home, riding 10 to 12 horses each morning before teaching clients in the afternoons, also fitting in dressage clinics and Pony Club training sessions. "We do have a lot of horses here," he concedes. "Some

come to the yard for short-term training, while some are here for longer and we will compete them. I also do a bit of producing and buying and selling, so lots of the horses come here to be sold on."

Starting out

Although his parents, Ian and Jacquie, could ride, Andrew's family wasn't traditionally 'horsey'. After a lesson at a local riding school, he took up riding aged eight on the family Shetland, Miss Ellie, shared by six cousins, who spent most of their time falling off her.

Presumably named after the TV show *Dallas*'s spirited southern belle, the Shetland version, who once came third in the Shetland Grand National, had her own fiery temperament. "She was a baggage! I didn't get on with her very well," Andrew admits. "I went to see her last year, having not seen her since I was a child, and she put her ears back and tried to bite me."

Miss Ellie died six months ago, aged 22, and with his trademark sense of humour, Andrew states that she lived past her sell-by date.

Andrew was a member of Bisley Hunt Pony Club from the age of 10, briefly trying his hand at Pony Club tetrathlon. "It involves running, riding, shooting and swimming – I was really good at running and not bad at shooting, but I used to drown in the swimming pool," he admits.

Despite appreciating the activities at Pony Club, Andrew found the environment a political one, leaving at 14. "I didn't enjoy it that much," he says. "I was outnumbered by females, which of course has its advantages, but I thought they were all screechy little girls..."

At this point, wife Polly interjects that she can vouch for Andrew's lack of prowess in the swimming pool, having seen him in her local pool when she was 13, floundering in the water and hanging onto the swimming instructor's



All in the name of charity: Andrew's smouldering pose as 'Mr February' in the UNICEF dressage riders' calendar.

pole. The couple have been together since they were 18, but when asked if they knew each other in their early teens, Andrew replies "Apparently we did, but I didn't know Polly – she was one of those screechy little girls."

Meeting the mentor

A few years later, by happy accident, Andrew met dressage guru David Hunt, clearly the key point in Andrew's future dressage career. Now British Dressage's head of international trainers, and the only British rider to have won a Grand Prix, Grand Prix Special and Kür at international CDIO level, David is also president of the British International Dressage Trainers Foundation. Andrew went to David's yard as a livery, but had no idea of his pedigree.

“The sport may seem glamorous, but it is much harder than it looks from the outside. You have to have a certain character to succeed”

“I didn't know who he was, but then I didn't know what dressage was either,” he explains. “I didn't realise the discipline went any further than a Prelim six test. It was a bit of a shock to see horses at David's yard doing piaffe, flying changes and passage.”

Andrew watched David riding each day and began having lessons. Undoubtedly seeing potential in his young protégé, David suggested to Andrew's parents that they part with his pony, Hughey, and that Andrew should start riding his aunt's dressage horse, Koffee Break.

This plan was swiftly put into action and Hughey was despatched, seemingly heartlessly. “My parents just got rid of him; and I loved that pony,” says Andrew, with deadpan humour. “We did everything – show jumping, dressage and eventing; he was brilliant, and so safe.”

Andrew claims he never even knew Hughey was going. “One day a girl came into the yard

and said, ‘I'm here to look at your pony’, and that was it – within a week he was gone,” he says. “In fact, Hughey went out on loan and then moved on to someone else. I saw him about a year ago, as a friend of my auntie has him now.”

Equestrianism over academia

From that moment, Andrew said goodbye to childhood riding and began dressage lessons in earnest, on Koffee Break.

“David was my mentor and became very important to me – he taught me a lot about riding and a lot about life,” says Andrew. He later went to work for David, choosing equestrianism over academia.

“I left school before my GCSEs, and it didn't occur to me to have a ‘proper’ job, like working in an office,” he says. “I didn't like school. I didn't have a bad experience – it just wasn't for me.”

Andrew never had any specific career aspirations, other than wanting to do something sporty. “I enjoyed athletics and rugby as a child and had the chance to take rugby up more seriously, but I don't think I would have been physically big enough,” he says. “I made the decision that I was going to get involved with horses, and stupidly didn't think I needed an education to shovel shit!”

Hindsight being a wonderful thing, Andrew now sees the error of his impulsive ways. “I should have learned a foreign language at school, and also business studies – as I now have a business of my own, it would be useful,” he says. “I wish I hadn't walked away from school.”

Fortunately, his parents were supportive of Andrew, whichever direction he went in. “They never finished school themselves,” he says. “My Dad left education and went straight into a trade. They weren't your typically rich, ‘horsey’ parents; Mum looked after my older brother Gary and I, and didn't work, and Dad worked nights. He bought me a horsebox, but it means he has never actually owned a car, which he is most upset about – it is a sacrifice he made. They knew I wanted to be involved with horses and were happy with that.”

Andrew was obviously a grounded youngster, claiming not to have any childhood heroes. “There was never anyone I wanted to be,” he states. Given that today's top dressage riders have a media presence and are sporting celebrities, does Andrew consider that people now look up to him?

“I can see that, but I think it is on a different scale to being a hero – I think people might want to be like me or be in the same



situation at times, but they don't want to be me,” he says. “I have had staff who come in and say ‘I want to run a yard like yours’, but I don't think they want to be Andrew Gould; it is just the situation that I might be in that attracts them.”

Andrew's situation, involving international travel and accolades from the country's leading dressage trainers, may seem dazzling, but he claims this is just a myth. “The sport may seem glamorous, but is much harder than it looks from the outside,” he says. “There's little financial reward and you have to have a certain character to succeed in this business – you can't do it just for the fun of riding.”

Like all professional riders aiming for success, Andrew faces many challenges. “The main one is maintaining the balance of running a business and focusing on my own competition,” he admits. “Some riders don't have to worry about financial difficulties and so can just concentrate on competing. The reality is that Polly and I are running a business, with clients and staff to look after.”

Family support

All professional riders need a strong back-up team, and Andrew is quick to praise his own. “You need good support – I have always had that and have been very lucky,” he says. “Polly and I are fortunate enough to have good staff; loyalty is key where they are concerned and it is not easy to find good people.”

Andrew's other team members are his supportive family. Andrew and Polly wed a year ago – a fellow rider, she showed at county level in her teens, but explains that dressage was never for her. However, Andrew insists she has a great eye for flatwork from the ground.

Polly used to groom for Andrew at shows and still drives the lorry, but motherhood has limited her time now. The couple's two-year-old son, Oliver, attends some shows in the summer months, staying with grandparents at other times. Andrew cites marriage and fatherhood as being his proudest moments and, when asked if more children are on the horizon, responds with





Andrew and wife Polly say that they have an excellent back-up team.



an enthusiastic yes. However, Polly is less forthcoming. "Not right away!" she says.

The couple do agree that they want a bigger family in the future, although Andrew hopes his children do not follow him into the equestrian profession. "I would never stop them, but I would rather my children experienced more of life and had an education," he explains. "I missed out on my education and a large part of the social side of growing up, due to my horsey involvement. I went to work for David Hunt at 16 and couldn't drive, so I didn't really go out much and most of the people there were older than me. I would like my children to do normal stuff, have a life and travel."

The competition string

Back into competitive realms, this year Andrew is hoping to capitalise on recent successes, which include winning one Intermediaire I and four Prix St Georges competitions in 2005, as well as becoming Elementary and Medium Regional Champion and Novice dressage to music National Champion in 2004.



Andrew hopes that eight-year-old Dutch Warmblood, Korenbloem Rebel G, will reach Grand Prix level next year.



He has two main horses he hopes to campaign in 2006, currently at small tour level [Prix St Georges and Intermediaire I]. "I have a few internationals in the UK and abroad this year, and hope to take Numero Uno and Rebel G to Grand Prix level in 2007," he says.

Rebel G, or Korenbloem Rebel G, is an eight-year-old Dutch Warmblood, jointly owned by Andrew's parents and Sara Green. He was purchased as a three-year-old for Andrew to ride.

Eleven-year-old Numero Uno is another Dutch Warmblood, jointly owned by Polly and Andrew. "He was a wedding present from our business partner, Craig Rawlins," Andrew explains. "Craig missed Oliver's christening and also our wedding, and the horse was in the yard being trained for Craig, with a view to selling him. So it was a peace offering!"

Andrew's other leading horse was Grand Prix-level Koffee Break, a Danish Warmblood who took Andrew to various European championships as a young rider, including the team's bronze-medal-winning performance in 2000. The pair also won the first Equestrian Dressage Rider Championship in 1998, receiving a training grant from event sponsor Equest.

HORSE had been told on authority that Koffee Break now resides in the dressage arena in the sky, but after sensitive questioning, Andrew cheerfully explains that in fact, the black gelding is living out, in happy, muddy retirement.

"Koffee Break had a brain tumour a few years ago, and I think people assumed he was no more," explains Andrew. "He was my best horse and my best friend – he'll stay with Polly and I forever."

Breeding matters

Andrew says a future project could be breeding his own horses, although he acknowledges that Britain is playing 'catch-up' to other European countries. "We are 20 years behind," he admits.

"We Brits are not strict enough with our breeding and don't do it on a large enough scale. In my opinion, if you breed 30 horses a year, you might have three or four good ones for top-level competition. So if you are only breeding three or four a year, you have a much smaller market."

"We don't breed the sheer volume of horses that they do overseas – like Holland, for example, where I buy my horses," he adds. "That's the problem – all top British riders will go abroad, when we should be buying our horses here. People are breeding better horses here now and are stricter with the bloodlines, but it will take

Andrew on...

The horse he will never forget

"This is definitely Koffee Break. He was the most difficult horse to ride – he wasn't designed for dressage and he taught me how to ride different types of horses. I was the only person to ride him from aged five to when he was 16, when he retired; we developed a relationship and a good bond."

The discipline he'd like to try

"This would be polo. I am desperate to try it. I love watching it."

The best advice he could give

"I never set too many goals too early on. People have too many pressures and see not meeting a goal as a failure. I don't have a goal to ride at the Olympics. If that happens, all well and good, but if it doesn't, I don't want to feel as if I have failed. I see so many young people saying they want to ride at the Olympics, and I think, 'say it when you believe it and when you really want to do it'. When you are young, or an amateur, you don't really understand the sport or how the system works. Every day is a learning curve."

Britain's Olympic chances

"I think 2012 will be our year; 2008 may still be a struggle for us. In 2012, we will have established our horses and riders more. There will be some good horses in Britain that will be the right age then, so if we keep the good riders we will have a fighting chance."

Andrew is philosophical about Olympic competition, instead preferring to describe each day as a "learning curve".



time – the Germans and the Dutch have taken generations to get where they are now."

So, with breeding improving on UK soil, does Andrew believe Britain can be near the top in terms of world-class dressage? "Breeding will help, but if you want an Olympic horse, you go to wherever you need to go to buy it," he admits.

"I think we have turned a big corner as a competitive nation, winning a bronze medal at the 2003 European Dressage Championships and Carl Hester doing very well individually at the 2004 Olympics. I also think the World Class Start and Potential scheme has helped team competitors actually become a team, rather than four individual riders. As a nation we are moving in the right direction. We have the riders and I don't think we have ever *not* had them – it is just riders with the right horses we are lacking."

A charitable contribution

Andrew is certainly not lacking fans – in fact, he gained an army of followers last year when he stripped for charity. "I was at the National Dressage Championships when [dressage rider] Daniel Watson asked me to be photographed for a calendar for UNICEF, which provides

communities with emergency relief," he explains. "I didn't really understand what was going on, so I said yes; I was roped into it!"

Daniel also 'roped in' other riders for the risqué project, including Carl Hester, Spencer Wilton, Kate Attlee, Nicola Jourdain, Sarah Millis, Becky Moody and Kate Elliott.

The future 'Mr February' thus found himself sitting on a well "somewhere in Kent" on a summer's morning. "At that time of day, it was chilly, and I had water from a hose sprayed all over me," says Andrew, whose moody shot is a highlight of the black-and-white calendar. "I thought the result was brilliant and Daniel worked hard to organise it. I'd do it again."

One photo that didn't make the final product is what photographer David Batten describes as "the bum shot", featuring the four men in the buff. "None of them were shy," David recalls.

Andrew has different recollections! "We needed a few glasses of champagne before we took our clothes off," he explains. "Carl and I didn't really want to go nude, but Spencer and Daniel did. They didn't use the shot, which is probably a good thing – Richard Davison said we looked like four sparrows at a bus stop." 🐦